

Ataulfo Argenta was a leading Spanish conductor who appeared to be developing an important career that was cut short by his early death at the age of forty-four.

He was a musically talented child who attracted considerable attention as a pianist, then entered the Royal Conservatory in Madrid at the age of thirteen in 1927. He won a Premio Extraordinario in piano at the Conservatory in 1930, and the Kristina Nilsson Prize in 1931.

The latter prize enabled him to study piano and conducting in Belgium and Germany. These studies saw him safely outside of Spain when the Civil War broke out in that country. After the end of that conflict, when general war broke out in Europe in 1939, he returned to neutral Spain where he worked in a variety of musical jobs, including staff keyboard player (mostly piano and celesta) with the National Orchestra in Madrid.

He returned to Germany for more studies from 1941 to 1943, studying conducting with Carl Schuricht and teaching piano at the Kassel Conservatory, then returned to Spain and made his conducting debut on a broadcast concert with the national radio orchestra.

His first performance with Spain's National Orchestra was on October 10, 1945. It is remembered as a brilliant debut and it led to his being appointed the orchestra's music director in 1947, a post he retained until his death.

He first conducted outside of Spain when pianist José Iturbi hired him to be his conductor in a performance the pianist organized at Harringay Arena in London; the orchestra was the London Symphony. This began a demand for his services as guest conductor with various European orchestras and on South American tours. He also founded a major music festival in Grenada.

He signed a contract with England's Decca record company and specialized in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century music, especially Spanish music. Among his most notable recordings was the opera Goyescas by Enrique Granados and the symphonic work Danzas fantásticas by Turina, which remained in the LP catalogue for over twenty years. His conducting style was lean, muscular, and precise. He was considered to be on the verge of a major international career when he died.



Tchaikovsky

SYMPHONY No. 4

In F Minor, Op. 36



Ataulfo Argenta conducting
Orchestra L'Orchestre De La Suisse Romande

Symphony No. 4 in F Minor, Op. 36, orchestral work by Russian composer Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky that, as the composer explained in letters, is ultimately a characterization of the nature of fate. The work premiered in Moscow on February 10, 1878, according to the Old Style (Julian) calendar, which was used in Russia at the time; according to the contemporary, or New Style (Gregorian), calendar the date was February 22 of that year.

In 1877 Tchaikovsky acquired a financial backer, the wealthy widow Nadezhda von Meck, who sent him a monthly stipend in return for his steady correspondence with her about his music. The two never met in person, but countless letters precipitated from their relationship. Those letters, most of which have survived, provide insight into the composer's perspective on his compositions. Of his Symphony No. 4, Tchaikovsky wrote to von Meck:

Never yet has any of my orchestral works cost me so much labour, but I've never yet felt such love for any of my things....Perhaps I'm mistaken, but it seems to me that this symphony is better than anything I've done so far.

Such enthusiasm was rather unusual for Tchaikovsky, who typically expressed great dissatisfaction with his works. In this case, however, he evidently felt that he had exceeded even his own demanding standards. The piece bore a dedication "to my best friend," a reference to von Meck, who agreed to accept the honour only on the grounds of anonymity.

Just a few months after Tchaikovsky began to receive support from von Meck, Symphony No. 4 premiered, with the composer's mentor Nikolay Rubinstein conducting. Several

weeks later, a colleague of Tchaikovsky's criticized the piece for being programmatic, that is, for carrying meaning—such as the depiction of an idea or scene—beyond the sound itself. Tchaikovsky defended his creation:

I don't see why you consider this a defect. On the contrary, I should be sorry if symphonies that mean nothing should flow from my pen, consisting solely of a progression of harmonies, rhythms and modulations....As a matter of fact, the work is patterned after Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, not as to musical content but as to the basic idea.

In another letter to von Meck, Tchaikovsky outlined the central concept of his Symphony No. 4 (which also reveals much about his perception of the "basic idea" of the famed Beethoven work). He explained that the ominous opening fanfare, stridently sounded by horns and bassoons, represents fate hanging over one's head like a sword. The theme suggests an all-consuming gloom that devours any brief glimpses of happiness, which appear mostly in the form of lighter melodies in waltz time. The second movement, Tchaikovsky continued, expresses the melancholy felt at the end of a weary day. The third movement then presents "fleeting images that pass through the imagination when one has begun to drink a little wine." Emerging from whimsy, the fourth and final movement projects a bold and positive energy. Although the dark opening theme from the first movement reappears, as if to remind listeners that fate cannot be outrun, the positive force cannot be suppressed. Having carried its listeners from gloom to melancholy to slow recovery to life-affirming energy, Symphony No. 4 ultimately concludes with Tchaikovsky's prescription for happiness:

If you cannot find reasons for happiness in yourself, look at others. Get out among the people....Oh, how gay they are!...Life is bearable after all.

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1 Andante Sostenuto - Moderato Con Anima - Allegro Con Anima 17:07

2 Andantino In Mode Di Canzona 8:42

3 Sherzo: Pizzicato Ostinato (Allegro) 5:25

4 Finale (Allegro Con Fuoco) 9:19

Total Time: 40:33

Transferred from a 2-track tape 15ips tape
Recorded by Decca 1955 at Victoria Hall, Geneva
Producer James Walker Engineer Roy Wallace



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